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ABSTRACT

This report describes a plan to improve student ability through cooperative learning. Inappropriate student interaction in social settings is attributed to lack of respect and responsibility. The study chose a language arts vehicle for the instruction of listening, communication, cooperation, organization, and problem-solving. This document contains: "Problem Statement and Content" (General Statement of the Problem; Immediate Problem Context; The Surrounding Community; National Context of the Problem); "Problem Documentation" (Problem Evidence; Probable Causes); "The Solution Strategy" (Literature Review; Project Objective and Processes; Project Action Plan; Methods of Assessment); and "Project Results" (Historical Description of the Intervention; Presentation and Analysis of Project Results; Conclusions and Recommendations). (Contains 26 references. Appendices conclude the report.) (BB)

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Improving Students' Social Skills of Respect and Responsibility Through Cooperative Groups

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This report describes a plan to improve students' ability through cooperative learning to become more respectful and responsible. Social skills targeted are listening, communication, cooperation, organization, and problem-solving. The population consists of 1st, 3rd, and 5th regular education, 7th and 8th grade special education. The classroom environments consist of regular education and special education classrooms in rural metropolitan areas. Students' lack of social skills will be documented through teacher survey, student pre and post surveys, teacher checklists, and teacher observations.

Through interpreting documented materials, students' inadequate social skills are a result of deficient parental involvement, overpopulated class size, lack of student support from administration, teachers inability to conform on teaching social skills, exposure to inappropriate media sources, and a negative shift in societal values.

Upon reviewing causes of why students interact inappropriately in a social setting, a selection of two major social skills (respect and responsibility) were targeted. The researchers will instruct these social skills through cooperative learning activities in a language arts setting. The strategies for teaching social skills will help improve student behavior in the future.

Post intervention data indicated an increase in student knowledge on how to listen, communicate, cooperate, and problem-solve while working in cooperative groups. Students' social skills improved across disciplines and during non-structured activities. Students were highly successful when guidelines for social skills were visually displayed and the teacher modeled cooperative learning activities.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Students in the targeted areas exhibit inadequate social skills and low self-esteem. Evidence that this problem exists is through teacher observation, incomplete homework, and classroom grades.

Immediate Problem Context

Site A

This urban elementary school has an enrollment of 503 students that provides services for grades pre-k through 8th grade. Between the hours of 8:45 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. teachers have three to four preparation periods a week so they can prepare lessons for their students. The make-up of students from the entire targeted site is 99.4% Black, 0.4% Latino, and 0.2% Caucasian. Low-income families represent 97% of the students, and none of the students are Limited-English-Proficient. In addition, the attendance rate is 94% with only 4 chronic truants. Mobility rate is 8.8%, well below the state's average of 18.25% (State of Illinois, 1998).

There are about 45.5% of Caucasian teachers in the district, 41.7% are Black, 10.5% are Latino, 2% are Asian, and 0.3% are Native American. The majority of the teachers at this site are African American and Caucasian. The faculty consists of about 45 full-time teachers, one principal, two assistant principals, one guidance counselor, one part-time nurse, and one special education resource teacher. The average teaching experience is 14.8 years, with 44.4% having a Master's Degree.

The school's academic curriculum is focused on reading, writing, math, science, social studies, fine arts, music, library, and physical education. Each classroom has computers that are now being upgraded with modern technology. The entire school is now going through major renovations. The school has just received 80% soundproof windows that will block out most of the noise that is heard from the local el station. This will help the students stay focused in the classroom and on standardized tests. Another major renovation is the new security system that will allow the students and faculty to feel safe during school hours. This site is located in a high crime area of the city so a new security system was very much needed.

Site B

Both targeted elementary schools are located in a metropolitan area. The grade levels are K-5th with an average of 21.3 students per class with a total population of 479 students. The school population is 51.1% Caucasian, 46% Latino and 2.4% Asian. The mobility rate is at 95.4% and 38.6% of the families are designated low-income. Sixteen teachers and one administrator make up the faculty. In addition to the classroom teachers, there are eight teaching assistants, two ESL (English Second Language) teachers, two DRC (Diagnostic Resource Consultant), two computer teachers, and one of each of the following: Title I reading specialist, gifted, art, music, band, physical education, librarian, nurse (half day). There is also one full-time guidance counselor. The majority of the teachers and administrators are Caucasian, with the average teaching experience being at 11.9 years. Less than half of the staff 46.1% has a Master's Degree.

The community has shown continuous change in the past ten years. Many of the previous homeowners were retired and of Eastern European descent. The new home buyers are young families of Latino heritage. With this change, the student enrollment has increased steadily. Throughout these changes the school district has made efforts to offer language classes in Spanish and English to the teaching staff and the community. As a result of the changing

community, the projected enrollment indicates continuous growth in the future. To prepare for the increase in student population, the administrative offices have moved to a new location and a new middle school is being built. This change will affect this targeted school by adding another grade (6th) and will change the school boundaries.

Site C

The targeted K-6 elementary school has a total enrollment of 458 students. The highest percentage of students being Caucasian, followed by Asian or Pacific Islander. Instructional expenditure per pupil is $3,165 with attendance at a rate of 96.3% and mobility being below the state average at 10%. Low-income families make up 33% with Limited -English at 5.2%.

The majority of the faculty is Caucasian with 22 K-6 full-time teachers and four classroom aides. The average teaching experience in the district is 13 years with 64% of them having a Master's Degree and 35% having a Master's Degree or above. There is a principal, a nurse, two social workers, one speech teacher, one PCC (Primary Cross Categorical) teacher, two primary and intermediate resource teachers, an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher, a half-time reading recovery teacher, and two computer and learning center teachers. The district shares an art, music, a district computer educator, and a band teacher.

The one story building is becoming overcrowded; so several special education teachers are sharing rooms. In a few years the district is planning to expand the junior high to accommodate the growing population.

Site D

The targeted junior high is located in a metropolitan area. There are a total of 414 students enrolled. The school's population is 75.4% Caucasian, 4.8% Black, 6% Latino and 13.8% Asian/Pacific Islanders. Low-income students from families receiving public aid, or eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches are at 3.6%. There are 1% of limited-English proficient students eligible for bilingual education. The attendance rate is 95.9%,

the mobility rate is 6.4%, and the chronic truancy rate is 0%. Average class size for seventh and eighth grade classrooms is 27.4.

The faculty has twenty-five staff members, two administrators, and two administrative assistants. In addition to the classroom teachers, there are five teaching assistants, one ESL (English Second Language) teacher, one home economic teacher, one art teacher, one Spanish teacher, one librarian, and one full-time nurse. The special education faculty consists of one cross-categorical teacher, one behavioral teacher, two resource teachers. There is one full-time guidance counselor, one school psychologist who travels throughout the district. The average years of teaching experience is 13.0 years, 35.7% of the teachers have a Master's Degree.

The community is showing growth through housing. Elementary buildings are overcrowded and the junior high plans to expand within two years to accommodate classroom size.

The Surrounding Community

The surrounding communities have a socioeconomic status ranging from $16,971-$73,136. These residential communities are low to upper class and are of a multicultural descent. The communities involve urban and metropolitan areas that consist of multiple ethnic and social classes. Districts involved in this study have had an increase of student population due to growth in housing, movement of established residents, and an increase of employment from newly established businesses. The population growth and how it will affect the schools in the future is an area of concern for each district. The districts are comprised of two K-6 buildings, two pre K-8, and one 7-8 building. Four attendance centers are located in the metropolitan area, while one of the five districts is located in an urban area. The students in the targeted communities have shown continuous growth through population and ethnic immersion.

The average income of these targeted communities is $45,056. The targeted districts' population averages at 26,525. The median property values averages at $169,916. The targeted

districts' ethnic backgrounds include Hispanic, African American, Asian, and Caucasian. Their religious affiliations include Catholic, Protestant, and Baptist.

National Context of the Problem

The problem of deficit social skills among children today is reflected in the newspapers and on television daily. In the past decade, the family unit has changed dramatically. As a result, children have been exposed to new types of media because of the lack of structure at home. This media influence has caused children to view extreme levels of violence and experience limitless behavior without consequences. This ultimately gives them a false sense of reality on how they are expected to behave when placed in a social situation.

According to Bellanca (1992), the following three factors have contributed greatly to the increased number of students who have a little idea about how to behave in a social organization other than what they have learned from the negative social models that saturate their lives: the dissolution of the "traditional" family, the increasing number of children coming from single and dual working-parents, and parentless homes is now considered the norm, not the exception. Sociologists have discovered that influences from the family structure have a direct correlation on how children perform academically and behaviorally in school (Comer, 1987). Other major factors are negative television role models, increased viewing of television, decrease in adult supervision, support, and direction. This clearly shows the negative modeling of anti-social, anti-caring behaviors, and has filled a void in the character formation of today's children. Finally, the trend toward providing a politically correct and positive educational environment for all has created a "value-empty" philosophy. It has left most public schools without any focus on what is most important for students to learn. In such an environment, students become confused and uncertain. In this state, they learn little about social responsibility, mutual caring, respect or cooperation. As the number of students increase, the amount of attention that a teacher can give

to the academic work in school diminishes. More time is spent on correcting negative behavior, stopping for interruptions and managing conflicts (Bellanca, 1991).

When schools attend to the need for social and emotional skills, the academic achievement of children increases, the incidence of problem behaviors decreases, and the quality of the relationships surrounding each child improves (Elias, 1997). In addition to the lack of family structure in the home there is a lack of positive influences in the media, causing children to accept and promote violence in their everyday social interactions. According to Newsweek.com (May 1999), the annual death toll from school shootings since 1992 has ranged from 20 to 55, and in the last school year there were 40 shootings. This shows how violence has made a steady incline within the past decade. In addition, 8% of high school students said they had carried a weapon to school in the preceding month. This problem of social skills is reflected in our schools across America. A poll conducted by Newsweek.com (May 1999) showed 64% of adults surveyed considered a shooting incident at their local school either "very likely" or "somewhat likely." Richard Lieberman, a Los Angeles school psychologist, reports that children have concerns that they are afraid of being called a snitch or that they may become a victim of a person holding a gun. "In nearly every case of recent school violence, there were warnings," states Ron Stephens, executive director of the National School Safety Council. Stephens cites a shooting at an Austin, Texas high school a few years ago in which two students were injured; officials later determined that 54 students had seen the weapon before it was accidentally fired, but none of them reported it.

A few schools are beginning to address bullying from the victim's perspective, and have implemented programs to teach social skills to children who have a hard time adjusting. According to psychologist Jan Hughes of Texas A&M University, "Starting well before high school is necessary... [and] you need to create a culture that promotes pro-social ways of dealing with conflict."

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the lack of social skills in the targeted sites, a student and teacher survey were given, observations were made by the researchers in the classrooms, and anecdotal records were kept throughout the duration of the research process. A letter was sent home to parents explaining the project before it began (Appendix A). No parents expressed concern about their child participating in the research project and surveys.

The students were given a survey (Appendix B) before completing a cooperative group activity. This survey recorded their attitudes and feelings about working independently and in cooperative groups. Thirty-six students were involved in the survey. The results of the survey are presented in Table One. After introducing the project and survey to the class, the students appeared interested and willing to participate.

The results of the survey showed that nearly half of the students 44% indicated that they would rather work in a group, yet the same number 44% of the students also indicated that they would prefer working alone, while12% indicate no preference. The survey revealed that the majority of students 75% felt that working in a group was easier and that they were better able to complete tasks. Although 55% of the students expressed concerns about communication within the group, the majority of the students felt that they listened to and respected others' opinions, while their concerns and opinions were heard half the time.

Table 1

Results of Student Survey

	Always	*Sometimes*	*Never*
1. like cooperative groups	44	42	14
2. rather work alone	9	47	44
3. rather work in groups	28	61	11
4. disagreeing in groups	17	55	28
5. complete work in a group	22	75	3
6. easy to work in a group	50	42	8
7. when you talk, others listen	22	50	28
8. others talk, you listen	67	30	3
9. respect others' opinion	75	25	0
10. others respect your opinion	28	55	19

Another method of documenting the problem at the targeted sites was a teacher checklist (Appendix C), which was compiled by teachers at all five sites. This survey reflects the most problematic areas observed in all the classrooms at the targeted sites. The results of the top four problem areas are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Results from the Teacher Survey

Behaviors	*Never*	*Rarely*	*Frequently*	*Always*
Talk during class	0	25	57	18
Come to class prepared	0	9	82	9
Turn in homework on time	0	7	65	28
Encourage each other	0	35	58	7

The observations taken by the teacher survey showed that 57% of the students were off-task some of the time, while 18% were off-task all the time. Students who talked during class 25% became disruptive and unproductive. Although 82% of the students came to class prepared most of the time, only 9% always came totally prepared and 9% rarely came to class prepared. A little over half 65% of the students turned in homework most of the time, while only 28% turned in homework all the time and 7% rarely did.

These results indicate that the majority of the students are not meeting the expectations of responsibility in the classroom. The largest area of concern was how well students encouraged one another. The survey indicated that 58% of the students sometimes encouraged a classmate, while 7% always encouraged, and 35% rarely encouraged a classmate. This indicates that 93% of the students observed may or may not encourage a classmate when needed.

The final method of documentation of evidence of the problem is anecdotal records. These records are kept by the researcher/classroom teacher, and will document any lack of pro-social behaviors among students in the targeted classrooms. These records will indicate disagreements, physical fights, and disrespect towards peers and/or adults, as well as poor organizational skills. These observations will be recorded throughout the duration of the

research process. The researchers will be introducing two cooperative activities per week in the areas of respect and responsibility. These skills will be reviewed and encouraged throughout the curriculum.

A review of the data from the two surveys revealed that half of the students felt they were not listened to when they expressed themselves and 55% of the students indicated that other people did not respect their opinions. These issues were a concern to other teachers as indicated by the survey results. The two main problems experienced by teachers, however, were "talking during class" and "lack of peer encouragement". In both surveys the lack of respect and responsibility are evident.

Probable Causes

The literature suggest a variety of causes for students' inadequate social skills and low self-esteem that interferes with their ability to progress in school. One such cause, according to Rimm (1997) in the following:

> Contradictory messages by parents are a major source of underachieving. If parents differ in their expectations, children learn escape and avoidance. The most leading cause of student underachievement is parents' lack of support for schools and teachers. Disrespect for education by parents sabotages educators' power to teach. (p.20)

There seems to be a consensus in the targeted schools that parents allow their children to follow negative trends that appear on television, in music, and fashion. These values contradict the values that build the foundation of schools. Also, the quality of homework turned in by the students indicates the lack of parental involvement in their child's education. In turn, students experience low-esteem, low confidence and low achievement scores. Another possible cause is the increasing number of students in classrooms. According to the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment (1998), "Teachers report that the classroom atmosphere is better, that students can receive more individualized attention, and that the teachers

have more flexibility to use different instructional approaches and assignments" (p. 11). This is also evident through the Illinois School Report Card (1998) that indicates an increase in class size at the targeted sites. The increase has created overcrowded classrooms, less individual instruction, and a seemingly less encouraging environment. To support the ineffectiveness of overcrowded classrooms, the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment (1998) suggests, "Smaller classes are more likely to be 'friendlier' places, where students develop better relationships with their classmates and with the teacher, encouraging students to become more engaging in classroom learning activities (p.11)." A third possible cause is lack of student responsibility as discussed by Sheldon Berman and Diane Berreth (1997) in the following:

> To nurture empathy and self-discipline in our young people, we need to help them learn basic decision-making and perspective-taking skills, delay gratification and persist through obstacles, develop a consistent set of positive values that can be translated into action, learn how to act responsibly, and have opportunities to successfully test skills. (p.24)

Surveys taken at the targeted schools also indicate students' inability to make appropriate decisions. Their lack of experience interferes with their ability to interact in a positive social manner.

Lack of Teacher Conformity

Teachers need to have a set of specific moral standards to refer to and abide by which would be implemented throughout the school's curriculum. Teacher camaraderie needs to be established in the educational system to ensure that social skills are modeled consistently and appropriately on a daily basis. Berman and Berreth (1997) state the following reason why adults need to support schools in teaching social skills:

> Adults also need to help schools become moral communities where students experience the values we hold dear. Our vision of a school as a moral community that nurtures empathy and self-discipline is the exception today. Making such schools commonplace will take concerted effort by the local school community and citizenry at large. (1997, p. 25)

Shifting of Values

The final possible cause for inadequate social skills and low self-esteem among students is the shifting of values in our society. Johnson, D., Johnson, R., Stevahn and Hodne (1990) discuss that a community cannot survive if people have different values and tend to only believe in their own self-interest. People's emphasis on material goods and their own self-interest may be a cause for the lack of social skills in our youth. This behavior promotes superficial values that make young people feel insecure and inadequate. According to Gabarino (1997), "The 1990's have shown some of the highest percentages of teenage suicide, unemployment, drug abuse, dropout rates and poverty" (p.12-16).

Inappropriate television models seek children out and influence negative behaviors and attitudes. Television, with its aptitude for modeling anti-caring behaviors, has filled a void in the character formation of today's youth. As Bellanca reported, "Much of what children see on television is violent, shows disrespect to authority..." (1992, p.202). This type of influence through the media shapes the children's thoughts and behaviors. Deficient parental supervision allows for the children to control their values and morals.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Upon reviewing the literature we found several solutions that would help our students improve and utilize respect and responsibility. The literature suggests using direct instruction, cooperative learning methods, instructional models, and conflict resolution strategies.

Conflict Resolution

Another solution possibility to help teach social skills is conflict resolution. Fogarty and Bellanca (1992) describe conflict resolution as a way "to provide students to solve problems, negotiate, and compromise at the right times" (p. 20). The literature offered several examples of implementing this technique. Conflict Resolution can fall into one of two categories: The first is a program in which the children work things out among themselves. The second is where a mediator helps out with the disagreement. The first technique, described by Inger (1991), is a program in New York called Resolving Conflict Creatively (RCCP). This program offers a curriculum with lessons on intergroup relations, cooperative learning, and dispute resolution strategies. The students work on active listening, cooperation, acceptance, and creative problem-solving (Inger, 1991). As a result, the teachers and administrators reported that the student mediators resolved an average of 100 disputes a year at each school. The schools noticed less discipline problems and an improvement in attendance. Overall, many students felt better about themselves and safer at school (Inger, 1991).

A different technique described by Anderson, Ewy, and Riehle (1997), is conflict resolution through interpersonal and political ideas. To help resolve specific conflicts in the

classroom, the following four steps were used: First, the students and the teacher clarified the conflict's attributes. Next, the students worked individually and collaboratively to come up with resolutions, long and short-term impacts, and an evaluation of its effectiveness. Lastly, the students would complete a peer and self-assessment to provide support and feedback on how they worked cooperatively. Students were able to compare what they have learned to what they have experienced, and they were also engaged in pursuing multiple viewpoints (Ewy et al., 1997). In addition, the students performed higher-order thinking skills through performance assessment tasks. This conflict resolution model would then be used in studying about the American Revolution. The classroom curriculum combined with direct instruction in communication and problem-solving is one of the main entry points for conflict resolution in schools (Lieber & Rogers, 1994).

Another program described by Walker, Colvin, and Ramsey (1995), is called First Steps. This technique was piloted in an early intervention program in Oregon. The staff and students were trained in pro-social behaviors, and they also learned how to settle differences amongst each other peacefully. Parents were also taught how to teach children to be successful in school. An evaluation of peer-conflict resolution has shown an improvement in overall school climate and an increase in self-esteem and responsibility (Slyck & Stern, 1991).

Instructional Models

Various instructional models have been proven successful in improving social skills and self-esteem in students. One example is the Social Attribute Checklist as described by McClellan and Katz (1993). This checklist is used as a guide among teachers and parents to observe, understand, and support children as they grow in their early years. The set of items on the checklist is a guide to formally and informally assess children in three categories: First, the mood of the child is observed in conjunction with his or her ability to empathize and depend on adults. Second, the child's social skill attributes are assessed such as asserting his or her own

needs and showing interest in others. Third, peer relationship attributes are observed such as being accepted by other peers and being invited by others to play or work. Research indicates that this helps the teacher more responsibly identify areas of strength in children and to help individual children overcome difficulties (McClellan & Katz, 1993).

Another example is using literature to teach values. Lickona (1993) and Leming (1996) discuss that in order for students to recognize and follow positive character traits, widely held values should be at the core of the school pedagogy. In addition, Sanchez (1998) discusses that leading educators have recommended stories about heroes as a way of teaching and learning values. The use of personal heroes from history, fiction, or current events encourages virtues such as honesty, tolerance, compassion, and responsibility. This may develop strong moral character traits in the students.

A final example is a program developed by the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) called the Coca Cola Valued Youth Program (VYP). This program described by Cardenas and others (1991) is a cross-age tutoring program in Texas, which combines low-achieving Hispanic middle-school students with at-risk Hispanic elementary students. Tutors have the opportunity to practice communication skills, model appropriate work habits, and display patience and understanding while working with other children. An evaluation of this program showed emotional and cognitive benefits, with an improvement in academic skills, attitudes, and an increase in school attendance. Decades of research establish that well-planned peer tutoring programs can improve student achievement and self-esteem as well as overall school climate (Gaustad, 1992).

Direct Instruction

Placing socially unskilled students in a learning group and telling them to cooperate will result in failure (Johnson & Johnson, 1992). Direct Instruction is one method to use when teaching social skills. The principal of direct instruction is to get students on-task and to keep

them on-task consistently (Mc Daniel, 1986). A team of cooperative learning consultants developed a program called "Project Extend" (Bellanca, 1992). It used clearly stated assignments, directions, and time constraints in a three-year period in five school districts throughout northern Illinois. Project Extend involved teachers, principals and parents in reinforcing how to work cooperatively, and how to care and respect for themselves and others.

Project Extend has six key steps that need to be conducted to be successful. The first step is called the hook or set. In a "hands-on" classroom, teachers model what cooperative social skills look and sound like. Students are engaged in activities that allow them to assess their own use of the social skills they are learning. Time spent in step one allows students to fill "prior knowledge" voids so that their learning is meaningful and productive.

Step two is called the lesson. After the hands-on activity is completed, students are given time to reflect and design two lists. The first list is of positive examples of appropriate social skills; the second is of negative examples of social skills. Both lists are posted in the classroom and added to periodically.

Step three is called the practice or follow-up. It consists of frequent amounts of practice in a short intense format of key behaviors at least once a day for five to seven minutes. This will allow students to achieve mastery of the social skill to use in everyday use.

Step four is called reflection, discussion, or closure. It is recommended that students reflect once a week during the practicing of social skill behaviors.

Step five is called feedback, recognition, and celebration. As students improve in demonstrating positive social skills, teachers reinforce individual and classroom improvement with praise, artifacts, and parties. All of these forms of positive feedback have a purpose of letting groups know they deserve recognition for their hard work.

The last stage is called transfer. It is key for all members of a school and the students' parents to recognize cooperative social behavior and for students to reflect on their own behavior without teacher instruction.

Cooperative Learning

Though the use of cooperative learning, students assist each other by using skills and strategies derived from direct instruction. Is cooperative learning more effective than learning alone? The California Task Force (1990) states, "Hundreds of studies demonstrate academic, social, and psychological benefit from well implemented cooperative learning programs with improved self-esteem and a sense of shared responsibility being important outcomes" (1990, p.81). However, this task is easier said than done. Children are more productive when working cooperatively in groups. They challenge one another and strive to be the best academically as well as socially. Both parties, the student and the teacher, need to participate equally. According to Bellanca and Fogarty (1992), "There are no quick fixes for successful educational change like cooperative learning. Any comprehensive program requires three to five years for staff development and implementation" (p.228). Helping students develop responsibility means teaching critical thinking and effective communication. This will instill the strategies that must progress during the cooperative learning stages.

According to Bellanca and Fogarty (1992), the Small Group Process of Cooperative Learning deals with six phases. These stages are forming, norming, conforming, storming, performing and reforming. During the forming phase, the teacher explains the expectations of working as a group. An important aspect of that group organization is establishing a sense of trust. This can be done through the use of cooperative games and activities. The second phase is referred to as norming. During this stage, the social needs of the students are determined. This will include both the conforming and non-conforming students. Once those non-conforming students are recognized, they will be influenced and pressured by their peers to conform.

Therefore, the norming process is complete. This directly lays the foundation for phase three conforming. At this point, students are cooperatively working together with the intent of contributing their individual ideas. By increasing these combined thinking strategies, students implement various types of graphic organizers within the group. The next phase is described as storming. Students are encouraged and challenged to engage in higher-level thinking during this stage. A common method of measuring this thinking is problem-solving. Students must utilize their minds collectively and agree to a common solution. Performing is the next phase in this process. Students are influenced to think at more complex levels and to generate more challenging ideas. The final phase is reforming. This focuses on completely restructuring the school setting. Identifying grades and test scores have become a basis for learning. Teachers test students on a national basis in order to establish an average. When students do not achieve that standard, it directly reflects negatively upon the teacher's instructional methods.

Students are given the opportunity to take learning into their own hands and make the teacher the facilitator. Cooperative learning enables students to engage in listening and social skills, allowing for them to work together and share various strategies. This interaction gives students the opportunity to become the facilitator as well as the learner.

These behaviors will lead to higher achievement in the students' work. "While using cooperative learning, the student's responsibility to his or her group will increase, willingness to take on difficult tasks will increase, and motivation and persistence in working towards a goal will increase" (1992, p.174). Thus, students take on an active role in their learning. Social skills establish a positive relationship with other peers. This eventually will lead to the common goals of working together cooperatively.

Bellanca and Fogarty (1992) state, "Knowing and using the process of group development is an important tool in instilling the concepts of responsibility in young people " (p.215). When students are in groups, they are assigned a specific role. For example, there

would be a leader, a reporter, a recorder, a materials person and an encourager. Even though each student has an individual task, they all must take responsibility for the final outcome. Cooperative learning has various methods that reach every student to improve upon their learning skills. "Group roles help students become aware of how their actions affect the group's productivity" (p.215). The student then develops responsibility for his or her own actions. Cooperative learning can be implemented in a variety of methods, which are incorporated into classroom learning through the use of teamwork. According to Alfie Kohn (1995), "Helpfulness and responsibility should not be taught in a vacuum, but in the context of a community of people who learn and play and make decisions together" (p.34). Educators and members of the community need support and guidance to make cooperative learning a successful program in schools and throughout the community..

According to Kagan (1992), cooperative learning has many positive benefits which include the following:

> Cooperative learning provides a golden opportunity for students to acquire social skills in a natural way. As the students interact in their cooperative groups, they become skillful in listening, paraphrasing, taking the role of the other, managing group processes, and dealing with the dominant, shy, hostile, and withdrawn group members. They acquire skills, not just learn about skills. (p.142)

Through the use of cooperative learning, students develop knowledge of subjects and form relationships with peers in the classroom. They learn to work as a team to strive for a common goal. This method of learning promotes the idea of teamwork and sets an example of how individuals must work together in daily life.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of implementing social skills with an emphasis on cooperative groups, during the period of September 1999 to December 1999, the targeted 1st, 3rd, and 5th regular education, and 7th & 8th grade special education, students will increase their ability to be respectful and responsible. This plan will contain a teacher survey, pre- and post-student surveys, social skills observation sheets, and teacher anecdotal records.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Introducing social skills by forming cooperative groups.
2. Using various teaching styles to teach social skills.
3. Engaging students in listening, communication, cooperation, organization, and problem-solving activities that emphasize group efforts.

Project Action Plan

The action plan was developed to improve students' social skills of respect and responsibility. This plan consists of three major components: forming cooperative groups, using various teaching styles, engaging in listening, communication, cooperation, and problem-solving activities that emphasize group efforts. The researchers will use a student pre and post-survey, a social skills observation checklist, and teacher anecdotal records until December 1999 to see if our intervention plan has improved social skills. The intervention will begin during September and will continue through December 1999. This plan will focus on improving students' respect and responsible social skills. The first step would be to form cooperative groups. Explain to students that they will be involved in cooperative group activities to improve their respect and responsibility for social skills. The second step would be to assign each group member a role to perform during each activity. The roles would be the coach, gofer,

recorder, reporter, spy, and team manager. The teacher would explain the roles and would ensure the students that everyone would have an opportunity to perform all roles. Once the roles are assigned, the class brainstorms rules for working in a group. For example, one rule for students in targeted grades is if you want to speak, you are given three marbles and you put one of your marbles in a cup to speak. This rule really works. It eliminates everyone speaking all at once and too many times. Once the rules and roles are established, the activities may begin. The researchers will teach two activities weekly with a thirty-forty minute duration time.

The action plan follows:

<u>Week 1</u>
Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Listening
Model: Do T-chart for what listening looks like and sounds like
Activity 1: Do you remember?
Summary: The students' ability to remember things about people will reinforce listening and paying attention. The teacher explains that this activity is about what people do to make you feel differently. The teacher invites three children to stand in front of the group and asks them what makes them feel happy. The teacher asks who can remember what child 1 said, child 2, child 3. The teacher keeps adding children at the front of the group as far as the group can be challenged.

Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Listening
Activity 2: Draw this
Summary: This activity is to focus on attentive listening. The teacher would creatively pair the students. The task is to have the students sit back-to-back while one student describes a figure to the other student. The listening student may not talk to his/her partner or see the original sketch. It is the listening students task to draw the figure that the other student describes. The students will reverse roles, receive a different sketch, and
repeat the activity. The teacher will be aware of all the students' social skills during this time in which interpersonal skills and social behavior are on focus.

Week 2
Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Listening
Activity 3: Tell/Retell
Summary: This activity is to teach attentive listening skills. Divide students into pairs. Instruct one student to share a fun adventure. Instruct the others to attend closely so he/she can repeat the story. Walk among the pairs and give a thumbs-up to each child seen listening. Use this monitoring time to be aware of misbehaving students, especially during these times when interpersonal skills and social behavior are the focus. Be aware of "the kid who..."seeks attention, feels inadequate, makes the power play, is looking for revenge or shows signs of emotional disturbances. To process effectively, conduct a brief sharing, then let several listeners tell the class what they heard in their partner interactions. Praise them for good listening. Have them tell how it felt to have someone listen so carefully.

Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Listening
Activity 4: Relaxation Technique
Summary: The students will learn relaxation techniques for problem management. The students will need a blanket . The teacher will discuss the importance of relaxation for effective problem management. Explain that it is difficult to make good decisions when one is upset or worried and that ideas come much more easily when one is feeling relaxed. Direct the relaxation exercise by having the students lie in a comfortable position and listen while you read relaxation script. Read the script in a calm, gentle, unhurried voice, pausing between each line. Have students discuss how they felt before the relaxation exercise? During? After? What does it mean to relax? What are some ways you can relax? How do you think relaxation can help you solve problems more creatively and effectively? Upon completion, allow students to continue discussion at their own pace. Do not rush this activity, or its benefits will be lost.

Week 3
Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Communication
Model: Do T-chart for what communication looks like and sounds like
Activity 1: How can this be?
Summary: This lesson is to illustrate that people may see the same situation in a different way. The teacher shows the students an illustration of a girl with a big smile on her face after finishing her math problem and sitting next to her is a boy with an angry look on his face with an unfinished math problem. Asks the students how the girl feels and how the boy feels about math. Ask do they feel the same way or a different way about the math lesson. If a child names a feeling other than what you expect, ask why. He or she may have a relevant thought; For example, the boy might be frustrated because he didn't complete his math but feel proud for trying. Discuss other examples if time and interest permit.

Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Communication
Activity 2: A good time or not?
Summary: This activity is to help children learn that timing is an important ingredient in successful problem -solving. Explain to them that they are going to learn about good times and not good times to express their feelings to the teacher. Do a scenario where you are pretending to talk on the public announcer to the principal. Ask the students is it a good time to talk? Ask you a question? After you have done the scenario, discuss with your students if it was a good time to talk or ask you a question. In their groups have material managers pass out illustrations and have the recorder write down the list of reasons why the students in the illustrations picked a bad time to talk to the teacher. Repeat this activity with a good time the students in the illustrations picked to talk to the teacher.

Week 4
Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Communication
Activity 3: Find a feelings match
Summary: This activity will help children pay careful attention. Have the materials manager from each group come up to the front. Give each of them an illustration. Have them show the illustrations to the audience for about one minute. The students must pick which two people may have an illustration that has the same feelings. Encourage the use of the word proud. Next have students find two illustrations where two children feel a different way about the same thing. For example one illustration is about a girl learning to ride a bike. One girl looks excited and the other girl looks afraid. Ask why do they think they feel differently.

Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Communication
Activity 4: Thermometer of Emotions
Summary: This lesson is to teach the students that feelings can change. Ask the students to think about a time when they have really felt scared, such as just before a big test or a play performance. Ask them how they felt after that event was over. Emphasize the fact that feelings do change, sometimes because the situation changes and sometimes because our thoughts about the event change. In their groups give each group an equal number of situation cards and a separate thermometer of emotions for each situation they receive. Instruct the groups to discuss their feelings about the situations and come to a consensus about the feeling they would have in response to each. On the situation cards, groups write down the feeling and indicate its intensity on a scale of one to ten. They then move the indicator on the thermometer to the appropriate "temperature." Next invite the groups to share their situations and discuss the feelings and levels of intensity they picked for each situation. Have discussion questions for group to answer on whether it was difficult to agree on the feeling and level of intensity for various situations? Why do you think that some of these situations resulted in intense emotions and others didn't? Why do you think that some of you felt more or less strongly about some of

the situations than others did? Imagine that two days have passed since the various situations occurred. Have your feelings changed.

Week 5
Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Communication
Activity 5: Healthy/Unhealthy Expression
Summary: The students should learn to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy expression of feelings. The teacher will discuss the difference between healthy and unhealthy expression of feelings. For example, if a person were angry, unhealthy expression would be throwing something and breaking it, whereas healthy expression would be talking about the problem without exploding. Invite students to share a few additional examples. Have students pick a partner and give each pair a healthy/unhealthy expressions worksheet and partners are responsible for completing the worksheet. After they complete the worksheet, have several pairs share examples of healthy and unhealthy expression for selected feelings. Record all suggestions on the chalkboard. Ask students was it more difficult to think of healthy or unhealthy ways to express the feelings? Were some feelings more difficult than others to find ways to express? Do you express your feelings in healthy or unhealthy ways? Do you see any advantages to healthy expressions? It is important that the teacher make a distinction between these two types of expression so children will practice healthy expressions and will lead a more emotionally healthy life.

Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Communication
Activity 6: Say What?
Summary: The students will be involved in learning effective interpersonal communication skills. The group will need a cue card, scene setter cards, four large index cards, pens or pencils as needed. To model this activity have the coach from each group come to the front and give one person a scene setter card and the other three receive a cue card. The person with the scene setter card studies his or her card and role-plays the situation on it for each of the other three volunteers. These volunteers respond as instructed by their cue cards. Discuss each role play as it is presented, identifying the interactive behaviors and listing them in one of the following four categories: Positive verbal- "I agree", Negative verbal- "shut up", Positive nonverbal-Nods yes, Negative nonverbal-Walks away, slams door. Have the students in their groups make up a scene setter card and cue cards that stipulate only a positive response.

Week 6
Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Cooperation
Model: Do T-chart for what cooperation looks like and sounds like
Activity 1: What might happen if I do that?
Summary: This lesson is to introduce the idea of solution-consequence pairs and encourage immediate evaluation of problem solutions. The teacher would show an illustration and tell the

students to pretend these two kids are at school screaming at each other. The teacher would ask why do you think they are screaming at each other. Ask if they think these students see what happened the same way or a different way. Ask the groups to think of what the boy might say and the girl's response. For example, he could ask for something. She could give it to him. He could punch her. She would be hurt. He could say, "I won't be your friend." She won't care. Hint-Point dramatically to the boy when asking for a solution and to the girl when asking for a consequence. If a solution is seemingly irrelevant, ask how it might solve the problem. If a consequence is seemingly irrelevant, ask why that might happen next. The child may have something relevant in mind. Continue to elicit solution-consequence pairs as long as time and interest permit.

Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Cooperation
Activity 2: 10 ways to Bond Cooperative Groups
Summary: This is a list of ideas that teachers used to help their cooperative groups bond. The list is as follows: Use one worksheet and one pencil, design a group ad, create a group song, make a group motto, make a group flag, set group goals, decide on a name for the group, list group accomplishments, create group awards, and brainstorm similarities among the group members. These ideas are used throughout the action research to help groups bond and work cooperatively. For example, naming your group and setting goals would be done at the beginning of cooperative learning.

Week 7
Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Cooperation
Activity 3: Rose colored glasses
Summary: The students will experience identifying the effects of irrational thinking. The partners will need two pairs of glasses, one with lenses covered in black construction paper and the other in pink, rose-colored glasses worksheets, and pens and pencils as needed. The teacher should introduce the idea of looking at things through rose-colored glasses, which means that everything looks great. Explain that if we hold onto irrational thoughts, we may act as though we are looking at things through black glasses instead. This means looking at things negatively, and looking at things negatively can affect the way we feel and behave. Have students pair up, then distribute rose-colored glasses worksheet. To model, ask for two volunteers to put on the glasses. Have a third volunteer read the first situation on the list aloud and the negative belief associated with it. The student with the black glasses on is to tell how he or she would feel and act based on this negative (irrational) perspective. The student with the rose-colored glasses on is then to state the more positive (rational) belief and answer the same questions from this new perspective. Instruct students to work together to fill out the rest of the sheet. Share responses when complete. Have students discuss whether they see a difference between the effects of rational and irrational thinking? What is this difference? Which kind of thinking results in a more positive effect? Which kind of thinking do you typically practice? What have your experiences been with the effects of irrational thinking? Do you want to change anything about

the way you think? If so, what? Teacher should reinforce the difference between the effects of rational and irrational thinking, pointing out that irrational thinking does result in more negative feelings and behaviors.

Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Cooperation
Activity 4: Talking it out
Summary: The students should recognize the value in sharing problems with others. Invite students prior to the lesson to write down a problem they're experiencing without putting their names on the paper. Pass out one problem to each group. Have the checker read the problem to the group. After they have heard the problem the group should brainstorm possible solutions. Once the solution is recorded, group members can move to another groups table and read the problem. This rotation method should continue until all groups have read every problem and listed possible solutions at every group table. Conduct a whole group discussion. Ask were the problems you heard similar to problems you've experienced? Did you think the solutions were good? Do you think its better to
tell someone else your problem and have him or her help solve it or try to solve problems all by yourself? What did you learn from this activity?

Week 8
Social Skill: Respect
Topic: Cooperation
Activity 5: We can if we try
Summary: The students will assess the advantage and disadvantage of cooperative and uncooperative decision making. The students will be in two groups. Group 1 must pass a beanbag relay style from one end of the room to the other without using their hands. Group 2 must form a human chain from one gold star placed on the floor to a second gold star placed a distance away. (The distance between the two points should be greater than the distance the students could reach by joining hand to hand at arm's length.) Upon completion of each activity, discuss how each group arrive at a solution to the problem. Discuss how the groups work together to solve the problem? What strategy worked best? What kinds of things made it difficult to work out a solution? How did you feel when the group used one of your ideas? What did you learn by doing this activity that might help you the next time you work in a group?

Social Skill: Responsibility
Topic: Organization
Model: Do T-chart for what organization looks like and sounds like
Activity 1: Interpersonal mystery sequence
Summary: This activity should strengthen understanding of sequencing by focusing on an interpersonal problem. The teacher will show illustrations out of sequence. The teacher would say here are some more pictures, but the story is out of order. Who knows what happened first? Come up and put the picture that would happen first here. Second? Third? Fourth? After each

sequence is given, ask for another possible order. Invite children to say what happened before and after each step.

Week 9
Social Skill: Responsibility
Topic: Organization
Activity 2: Big & Little choice
Summary-The students should learn to distinguish between major and minor problems and to recognize that these perceptions can change. The teacher will display a variety of magazine pictures showing people in each of the following situations: grocery shopping, reading the classified ads, looking at a new house to buy, and trying on some new shoes. Discuss each picture and identify the decisions connected with the pictures. Categorize each decision as being either big or little and explain that one determines whether a decision is big or little by considering the consequences of the decision. Illustrate that whether the decision is big or little there are steps that go along with making a decision. Have students select a partner and they will create situations and the class will have to determine whether or not it is a big or little choice. Upon completion, discuss with the class the difference between big and little decisions. Can the same decision be a big one for one person and a small one for another person. (For example, a teenager choosing a new after-school job and a parent's choosing a new job to help support a family.) What makes a decision big or little? It is important to make children aware of their decision making and practice helps make better decisions.

Social Skill: Responsibility
Topic: Organization
Activity 3: Facts & Beliefs
Summary: The students will engage in differentiating between facts and beliefs. The teacher would introduce the activity by asking students what a fact is and what do they think a belief is. The students will be with a partner. One student will be in charge of the facts and the other student will be in charge of the beliefs. Each pair of students will have a facts and beliefs game board. When a statement is read by the leader, the class discusses whether it is a fact or a belief. If it is determined to be a fact, the partner in charge of facts puts an F on the game board. If it is a belief, the partner in charge of beliefs puts a B on the board. The first person to get three F's or three B's in a row is the winner. Discuss with the students whether it was difficult to figure out which statements were facts or beliefs? Do all people have the same beliefs about a given fact? Can you think of a fact about yourself? It is important to help students see that facts can be proven and that it is often the beliefs about the facts that create problems among people.

Week 10
Social Skill: Responsibility
Topic: Problem-Solving
Model: Do T-chart for what problem-solving looks like and sounds like
Activity 1: Story & Brainstorm Scenarios

Summary: This activity is to help encourage alternative solutions and help children see that they do not need to give up too soon. The teacher can read any storybook that presents an interpersonal problem. Tell students that you are going to read a story, but first you want to pretend a problem. Ask a student to stand up in front of the book so that no one else can see the book. Ask students who can think of something to say to the student so that he/she will sit down? Take many solutions. After this model, read the story to the students and ask what was the problem in this story? Have the students list some alternative solutions to how the character may have handled the situation. Hint: If during the first part of the lesson a child really is in the way while you read a story, ask the group for ideas to solve this problem. If hitting or pushing is suggested, ask, "How might that person feel if you do that? After the response, ask, "Can you think of a different way?"

Social Skill: Responsibility
Topic: Problem-Solving
Activity 2: Tic Tac Toe
Summary: This will give children practice in generating solutions and identifying enumeration's. Tell students that you will be playing a game of tic-tac-toe in a special way. To warm up, play the game the regular way and then began the special game. To begin the game, tell the class a problem. The x person thinks of lots of solutions, one for each box and the o person does the same also. Each person takes a turn picking a box and giving a solution. If the person gives a different solution, he or she gets to put an x or o in the box. If the person gives a solution like one that was already given, he or she sits down and another player gets a chance. If the new player gives a different solution, he or she can then pick the same or different box. As soon as we put a solution in the box, the rest of you watch and try to catch solutions that are kind of the same. Pick to children to come up and play the game. Hint: If a child's response is seemingly irrelevant, ask, "How will that help keep Tim from being angry?" If the response is still irrelevant, erase the idea and ask for a new solution.

<u>Week 11</u>
Social Skill: Responsibility
Topic: Problem-Solving
Activity 3: What might happen next III
Summary: This activity reinforce the idea that what we do and s: affects what others do and say. The teacher shows an illustration of a boy pushing another boy. The class discusses the picture. Let students suggest a number of possible problems, then choose one. Ask class what is this boy's way of solving this problem of making it better? Write down all of the causes and possible effects of this boy pushing the other boy. Have students think about a time when they made a wrong decision that encourage a negative response from someone else.

Social Skill: Responsibility
Topic: Problem-Solving
Activity 4: Is that a good Idea?

Summary: The following examples show how guiding the child to focus on alternate behaviors can help avoid arguments, counter-arguments, and simple power plays between teacher and child: Erika's hand is near the blades of the egg-beater as she is mixing soap flakes and water. Is that a good place for her hand? Sam is standing under a swing another child is on. Is that a good place to stand. Linwood is tying his rope to a gate where people are trying to enter. Is that a good place to tie your rope. The teacher should discuss these scenarios and relate them to their school environment.

Week 12
Social Skill: Responsibility
Topic: Problem-Solving
Activity 5: Picture Problems
Summary: The students are going to solve problems by using picture cards. The materials manger gets the materials and reporter tells the ideas following the task. Have students work in pairs and the materials manager will present the problematic situation. Have the partners talk about the first three steps to the problem-solving mode. Step1. What do you think the problem is? Why? Step 2. What do you think you should do? List three ideas. Step 3. Choose one idea. Tell why you chose it; explain your criteria. Have students work through the steps to finding a solution to their picture problem. Have each partner present their steps to solving their problem to the class. To process the social skill of team problem solving, have students share a school problem in which a friend helped. You could also have the students do a metacognitive piece to have them rate their teamwork as partners for the picture problems.

Social Skill: Responsibility
Topic: Problem-Solving
Activity 6: Teamwork story problem
Summary: This activity is to introduce teamwork to the classroom. Ask students to share a time when you have to use teamwork. Ask students to tell a time when you like having teammates. You would do a T-chart on what teamwork looks like, sounds like, and feels like. The students will be given assigned roles. Each team will have a story problem. Each team will have five minutes to generate at least five solutions. Have teams agree on the best solution to its story problem. Ask students to talk about an experience in which they wish there had been better teamwork. At the end of activity have the students complete a plus and minus chart on teamwork.

Week 13
Social Skill: Responsibility
Topic: Problem-Solving
Activity 7: Finding solutions
Summary: This activity will help students find solutions to problems. The teacher gives each group a problem. For example, problem one is Marianne is restricted from free play. The teacher will ask the group to read the dialogue between Marianne and her teacher to find out what happen, how does student feel, what can child say or do to come to a solution. The teams

would come up with as many solutions as possible. The reporter will read the problem and solutions to be critiqued by the classed.

Social Skill: Responsibility
Topic: Problem-Solving
Activity 8: Multiple Solutions
Summary: The students should learn that most problems have more than one solution. The teacher would project the transparency of various camp-out food items on an overhead screen. Direct the children to pick out any four items to pack and draw or list them. The students may spend no more than three dollars. Allow children to share selections made, emphasizing that not everyone selected the same items and that there are often many different ways to solve problems. In their groups give the students a problem written on the chalkboard. The boy next to you in school keeps copying off your paper. You are out of milk and want to have cereal for breakfast. Your little brother keeps getting into your sticker book when you aren't home. Invite students to share solutions. Have students discuss if there is only one way to solve a problem? Why is it sometimes helpful to listen to other people's ideas on how to solve a problem? What have you learned about solutions to problems? It is important to encourage students to be open-minded in look for solutions to everyday problems.

Methods of Assessment

To assess the effectiveness of our action research project, a social skills observation sheet, student pre and post-surveys, and teacher anecdotal records will be processed throughout the project. The social skills observation sheets will be used to document whether the student has not at all attempted to improve a specific skill, or whether the skill is in progress, or if the skill is mastered. As the project continues, the level of mastery should improve as a result of the implementation of the action plan. There will be a student pre-survey to get a baseline of the level of comfort the students feel about working in groups. The student survey will be titled, "How well do you think you get along with your classmates?" The students would check off the letter A for Always, S for Sometimes, and N for Never. This survey will be used to document the progress of students attitudes toward working in cooperative groups. Toward the end of the project, there will be a student post-survey to see if behavior has improved. The final method would be teacher anecdotal records that would describe the students negative and positive behaviors that occurred during group activities. From this data, the researchers

would create a table to compare the before and after behavior upon implementing this plan.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The terminal objective of the intervention was to address the inadequate social skills and low self-esteem that interfered with students' ability to make appropriate decisions. Indications were from teacher observations, incomplete homework, and poor grades. Therefore, the terminal objective stated:

As a result of implementing social skills with an emphasis on cooperative groups, during the period of September 1999 to December 1999, the targeted 1st, 3rd, and 5th regular education, and 7th & 8th grade special education, students will increase their ability to be respectful and responsible. This plan will contain a teacher survey, pre- and post- student surveys, social skills observation sheets, and teacher anecdotal records. In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Introducing social skills by forming cooperative groups.
2. Using various teaching styles to teach social skills.
3. Engaging students in listening, communication, cooperation, organization, and problem-solving activities that emphasize group efforts.

Action Plan Interventions

Social skills instruction with an emphasis on cooperative groups was implemented in the targeted 1st, 3rd, and 5th regular education and 7th & 8th grade special education levels twice a week for thirty to forty minutes. The researchers sent a parent letter home to inform parents of the targeted action research (See Appendix A). The students were given a pre-survey on how well they interacted within a group (See Appendix B). A student post-survey was given at the end of this action plan to compare the before and after results upon implementing this action plan

(See Appendix C). The teachers then began to discuss cooperative learning rules. To gain a sense of responsibility, the students created some of the rules for working in cooperative groups. Next, the students were taught the responsibility of each role while working in cooperative groups. The roles were recorder, reporter, gofer, coach, spy, and team manager. The students were placed in cooperative groups of six members. In the first stage of forming the cooperative groups, the teachers started with activities to bond cooperative group (See Appendix D). This is an important aspect of group organization through establishing a sense of trust amongst group members (Bellanca and Fogarty, 1992). The activity was designed for the students to share their interests, hobbies, and generate a team name. This gives the students a positive relationship and ownership to their cooperative groups. This active role gave students the confidence to take risks within their cooperative groups. The beginning activities formed a foundation that students could build upon for their respect and responsibility roles.

The lessons for the research project were divided into two main categories: Respect and Responsibility. During these specific activities, the researchers modeled each activity until groups were able to begin the task on their own. As the groups worked cooperatively, the researchers observed one group during every lesson while taking anecdotal notes and observation checklists (See Appendix E & F). The first focus of our cooperative learning research was improving respect through listening. Before all activities, a T-chart was done to introduce each skill. The T-charts asked the students for examples of what a good listener looked like and sounded like. The first activity was a tell/retell lesson, that allowed the students to focus on being active listeners (See Appendix G). The teacher began to model the activity with students by randomly picking students to continue the story until an inattentive student broke off the repeated story. Once success was established and the students understood the guidelines for the listening activity, they broke into cooperative groups. Within their cooperative groups, they picked a partner and told an adventuresome story that their partners would actively listen to in

order to repeat. Once the pairs listened actively to their partners, they would begin to add one person from their group to share their adventuresome story until each cooperative group member listened and repeated each member's story. The cooperative groups became successful listeners and the lesson was accomplished. They were praised and rewarded for good listening skills which gave them a boost of confidence in themselves and as a group. The students were given a chance to share how they felt about having someone listen to them actively. The second focus of our research was improving respect through communication skills. This activity was geared toward students distinguishing healthy and unhealthy emotions (See Appendix H). The teacher began with a whole group discussion of, "What would you do if a student was not sharing the crayons?" The students gave a list of responses as follows: tell the teacher, take them from the student, punch the student, call the student a name, or cry. From these examples, the teacher began to discuss the terms healthy and unhealthy expressions. After the discussion, the teacher asked the students to label the responses as either healthy or unhealthy. Once the class put the responses into the appropriate categories, they were ready to communicate healthy and unhealthy expressions in their cooperative groups. The groups were given a healthy/unhealthy expression worksheet that provided five descriptive emotions. The groups were to come up with a healthy and unhealthy expression for each descriptive word. After they completed the worksheet, the groups would share their examples. The teacher would discuss if it were more difficult to give healthy or unhealthy expressions. This lesson would help the groups see that making healthy decisions could be done effectively through communicating. The students would also learn that practicing healthy expressions would develop their social skills and improve their conflict-resolution techniques.

The third focus was on respect through cooperation. The activity was cooperative, competitive, and individualist (See Appendix I). The teacher began with an oral discussion of various ways in which people cooperate on a daily bases. Each suggestion was written on the

chalkboard through a story web form. After all the suggestions were written down, the students were allowed time to visualize responses on the board and distinguish between cooperative, competitive, and individualist. We discussed the term, "cooperative" as two or more people working together toward a single goal. The term "competitive" is when one or more persons worked against each other toward a single goal. The term "individualistic" as when one person worked alone to reach a goal. Once all the roles were established, the students were to get into their cooperative groups. The teacher explained the activity and assigned each group a theme of cooperative, competitive, or individualistic. The groups were given a hanger, string, scissors, and magazines. Each group would look through the magazines to find pictures that matched their theme to create their group mobile. At the end of this activity, the students would display their mobiles and the class would view the photographs and discuss what theme they represented. This also gave the students a chance to challenge a photo that hung on the mobile. The group would have to defend their reason for hanging the photo on the mobile. This assessed whether the students understood the difference between cooperative, competitive, and individualist.

The fourth focus was on responsibility through problem-solving. The activity was problem-solving through picture problems (See Appendix J). The researcher started with presenting a problem to the class through an illustration. The researcher presented the three problem solving steps on the board as follows:

Step 1: What do you think the problem is? Why?

Step 2: What do you think you should do? List three ideas.

Step 3: Choose one idea. Tell why you chose it; explain your criteria.

Once the problem-solving steps were put on the board, the students began to work in their cooperative groups to complete the problem-solving steps. Once the students followed the problem-solving steps, the researcher asked the students to share their interpretations and solutions to this picture problem. After the explanations, the students were given various

illustrations to problem-solve in their cooperative groups. They went throughout the problem-solving steps and generated their own opinions on the illustrations. The reporter of the group announced and explained-justified their solution to the class. At the end of this lesson, to process the social skill of team problem-solving, the researchers had the students share a school problem in which a friend helped.

The fifth focus was responsibility through organization. The original list of activities for organization were Interpersonal Mystery Sequence, Big & Little Choices, and Facts & Beliefs. However, due to field trips, assemblies, and special projects/presentations for the implementation of this project, this portion of the lesson was revised. To monitor group organization skills, the researchers gave out bonus points for groups displaying cooperative skills, keeping a clean desk, and completing homework.

Presentation and Analysis of Project Results

In order to assess the effect of social skills instructions on cooperative behavior of the targeted classes, the researchers kept anecdotal records of cooperative activities, as well as analyzed the results of the student surveys, which were given before and after the implementation of the instruction. The results of both student surveys are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

	Always		*Sometimes*		*Never*	
	Pre	*Post*	*Pre*	*Post*	*Pre*	*Post*
1. like cooperative groups	44%	34%	42%	66%	14%	0
2. rather work alone	9%	13%	47%	56%	44%	31%
3. rather work in groups	28%	31%	61%	63%	11%	6%
4. disagreeing in groups	17%	33%	55%	57%	28%	10%
5. complete work in a group	22%	64%	75%	33%	3%	3%
6. easy to work in a group	50%	44%	42%	53%	8%	13%
7. when you talk, others listen	22%	31%	50%	56%	28%	13%
8. others talk, you listen	67%	60%	30%	40%	3%	0
9. respect others' opinions	75%	57%	25%	43%	0	0
10. others respect your opinion	28%	34%	55%	63%	19%	0

Generally, the post-survey indicated that the majority of the students 66% enjoyed working in cooperative groups and an increase of 8% preferred working in groups, (items 1 and 3) and 13% indicated a preference to "work alone" (item 2) instead of working in cooperative groups. Some of the responses on the post-survey revealed that more students 26% felt they disagreed more in cooperative groups (item 4) although the majority of the students 64% indicated that the tasks were completed with little change in the level of difficulty as shown in items 5 and 6. In the pre-survey students indicated concerns about communication within the group and the

post-survey concluded that 15% of the students felt "they were listened to" and 97% of the students felt "others respected their opinion" which is a 14 % increase from the initial survey. However, students indicated that their own "listen skills" 7% and "respect for others" 18% decreased from the pre-survey. This correlated with the increase shown in disagreements found in item 4. The survey also indicated that students changed their original thoughts about working with others from "always" to "sometimes" in item 1, 8, and 9 which indicated the "storming" process and group differences for problem-solving. As a result of these processes, the survey indicated an increase in task completion, item 5 and self- esteem, items 7 and 10.

As the groups began to recognize positive and negative social skills while working together in cooperative groups, shown in items 3 and 6, they also gained insight into becoming responsible and respectable students for themselves and others.

Cooperative learning activities for targeted social skills were taught two times a week for approximately two to three weeks for a duration of four months. After completion of the final cooperative learning activity, the researchers completed a social skills observation sheet to assess students' progress. Students mastery of skills increased from September to December and skills not displayed decreased from September to December. The results of each researcher's observation sheet are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Results of Social Skill Observation Sheet

Key : Mastered Skill ++ Working on Skill + Skill not Displayed -

	September	**October**	**November**	**December**
Listen	37% ++ 50% + 13% -	50% ++ 50% +	63% ++ 33% + 03% -	80% ++ 17% + 03% -
Communication	63% ++ 23% + 13% -	60% ++ 40% +	63% ++ 37% +	83% ++ 13% + 03% -
Cooperation	40% ++ 43% + 17% -	63% ++ 37% +	63% ++ 37% +	67% ++ 33% +
Problem Solving	37% ++ 53% + 10% -	50% ++ 50% +	70% ++ 27% + 03% -	80% ++ 13% + 07% -

The researchers assessed all social skills on the social skill observation sheet, while instructing one social skill at a time. Instruction started with the students listening and at the end of the two weeks assessed all social skill areas being addressed. Throughout the four months, students at the "skill not displayed" stage gradually increased to "working stage" and "working stage" increased to "mastery". There were exceptions for students at the "skill not displayed" stage in December due to off-task behavior. In September, listening was mastered at 37% and

increased to 80 % in December. There were exceptions of 03% in the "skill not mastered" due to uncertainty of teachers' expectations of the skill. Communication was instructed in October while the social skill of listening was still being reinforced. "Mastery of skill" was 63% in September, while "being instructed" in October was 60% and increased to 83% in December. Exceptions of 03% were still evident. Cooperation was instructed at the end of October through November while the social skills of listening and communication were still being reinforced. "Mastery of skill" was 40 % in September, while "being instructed" in October through November was 63% and increased to 67% in December. There were no exceptions. Problem-solving was instructed in November through December while the social skills of listening, communication, and cooperation were being reinforced. "Mastery of skill" was 37% in September, while "being instructed" in November was 70% and increased to 80% in December. There were exceptions of 07% in the skill not displayed stage due to off- task behavior.

The researchers took anecdotal notes documenting the strengths and weaknesses of students' progress during the cooperative learning activities. Initially as the social skills were introduced, a majority of students first experienced difficulty "mastering skills". As activities finalized, students' ability to demonstrate social skills improved. Researchers observed during listening activities that students were using quiet voices, reminding each other to take turns, and expressing concern to each other when directions were not clear. For communication, researchers noticed children voting, compromising, and combining ideas. However, researchers observed students who changed answers during activities, which created group arguments. In addition, passive students did not always feel comfortable to equally participate. Throughout social skills activities for cooperation, researchers noticed students assisting and encouraging each other and checking with each other if directions were clearly understood. During the last targeted social skill of problem-solving, activities were noted to be more successful when guidelines and visuals were clearly explained and displayed for the students. Researchers

documented students using various techniques to solve their problems such as, voting, compromising, and rethinking all new ideas.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of the action plan showed favorable results for improving students' social skills through cooperative groups. Research has shown that educators have found a lack of appropriate understanding for respect and responsibility in the classroom. It is evident that our communities are changing and that students need to understand their choices so that they are able to become successful and independent members in their community. Educators will find improvement in student performance and classroom climate through the use of cooperative learning. Students will benefit personally and professionally through skills obtained during cooperative learning activities.

Based on the results of the research project, the researchers feel that components of cooperative learning should be emphasized as follows: (1) Attention was given to positive social skills instead of negative behavior displayed in the classroom, (2) students established a sense of trust among their peers that allowed them to exceed researchers' expectations and goals, (3) and students demonstrated transfer of social skills beyond the structured activities as a tool of self-awareness. Cooperative learning has shown to be a valid tool for authentic assessment.

In order to maintain a successful cooperative learning environment, researchers noted the following recommendations: (1) A continuous spectrum of cooperative skills needs to be taught throughout all grade levels, (2) a baseline needs to be established in the beginning of the school year to determine the degree in which social skills are lacking in the classroom, (3) students should reflect in daily journals at the end of each social skill activity, (4) students should also complete a processing piece to assess knowledge of lesson, (5) and activities need to be aligned with the curriculum in order to meet standards and provide enough time to complete activities.

The information generated from this action research project indicated a favorable response to teaching social skills through cooperative learning in schools today. Lack of parental involvement, violence in the media, shifting of values, and increased class sizes have all been factors in decreasing social skills in students. This research has shown that it is inevitable that educators are the social structure for developing respectful and responsible adults.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Parent Letter

Parent Letter

September 4, 1999

Dear Parent(s),

My name is Mrs. Pearson. I am your child's teacher this year. I am currently completing my master's program through IRI Skylight and St. Xavier. As part of the graduation requirements, I am doing an action research project from now until December of this year. The topic is teaching social skills through cooperative learning. The intent is that through instruction of certain social skills, working with peers in the classroom will improve. Your child will be involved in various cooperative group activities, student surveys, and learning various social skills. I will be making observations throughout the project and results will be recorded. Participation will be in keeping with the normal school procedures. Group activities are a part of your child's daily routine in my class. Many of the activities that we do in class will be counted as a part of your children's speaking and listening grade. If you do not want your child's results in the project his or her grade will not be affected in any way by that decision, and will be kept confidential. I look forward to working with your child in what I hope is a very effective and enjoyable project.

If you have any questions, concerns, or comments, please feel free to contact me at any time. I will be glad to discuss the project with you in detail.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Pearson

Appendix B
Student Pre-Survey

Name _____ Date September, 1999

How well do you think you get along with your classmates?

Directions: Read each question below carefully and place a check under the column that applies. **A** for Always, **S** for Sometimes and **N** for Never. This is to be done individually and will be collected when everyone is finished. Be honest when marking your answers.

QUESTIONS	A	S	N
1 Do you like working in cooperative groups?	✓		
2 Would you rather work alone?		✓	
3 Would you rather work in groups?		✓	
4 Do you find yourself disagreeing more than 2 times when in cooperative groups?			✓
5 Are you able to complete your work when working in groups?	✓		
6. Is it easy to complete activity when working in groups?			✓
7 When you talk, do others listen?			✓
8. When others talk, do you listen?	✓		
9 Do you respect other peoples' opinions in the group?	✓		
10 Do other people respect you when you give your opinion?			✓

Appendix C
Student Post-Survey

Name _____ Date December, 1999

How well do you think you get along with your classmates?

Directions: Read each question below carefully and place a check under the column that applies. **A** for Always, **S** for Sometimes and **N** for Never. This is to be done individually and will be collected when everyone is finished. Be honest when marking your answers.

QUESTIONS	A	S	N
1 Do you like working in cooperative groups?	✓		
2 Would you rather work alone?	✓		
3 Would you rather work in groups?			✓
4 Do you find yourself disagreeing more than 2 times when in cooperative groups?		✓	
5 Are you able to complete your work when working in groups?		✓	
6 Is it easy to complete activity when working in groups?		✓	
7 When you talk do others listen?			✓
8 When others talk do you listen?	✓		
9 Do you respect other peoples' opinions in the group?		✓	
10 Do other people respect you when you give your opinion?		✓	

Appendix D
Activities to Bond Cooperative Groups

BASE GROUPS

In task groups, the same students work together only for the duration of the task. That may be a five-minute pair-share or 40 minutes a day for 10 to 20 days. In base groups, the same students work together several times a week for at least a month and perhaps as much as a year.

COMPOSITION OF BASE GROUPS Base groups consist of three to five students randomly mixed to ensure heterogeneity of ability, motivation, social skills, sex, race and ethnic backgrounds. They are the classroom glue. In base groups, students develop their teamwork, build trust and solidify friendships.

Although it is not unusual for some teachers to form base groups in the opening week of school, it is better to hold off for at least a month. This gives the teacher the chance to observe each student in task groups. Who works well in a group? Who has difficulty? Who gets along with student A? Who doesn't?

BONDING OF BASE GROUPS The most effective way to help base groups bond is to structure activities that help the members develop a common identity. These activities include picking a group name, making a group motto and flag, writing an editorial to praise the group, creating a group logo on a T-shirt and setting group goals. After the groups have completed the identity task, have each group post the result and describe it. Encourage them to practice their roles and concentrate on encouraging, listening and helping each other.

10 Ways To Bond Cooperative Groups

- Use one worksheet and one marker or pencil per group
- Design a group ad
- Create a group song
- Make a group motto
- Make a group flag
- Set group goals
- Decide on a name for the group
- List group accomplishments
- Create group awards
- Brainstorm similarities among the group members

USES OF BASE GROUPS There are a variety of uses for the base groups. In addition to the team *bonding activities, social skill practice sessions* and *goal evaluations*, base groups serve as a place to *review the week's work, discuss current events, connect the themes and topics studied in various content areas,*

? What are base groups?

A
- Three to five students mixed by the teacher
- Members who meet together regularly over a long period of time
- Members who build trust and develop social skills
- Members who complete special learning tasks such as unit reviews, goal setting and problem solving

? When are the best times for base groups to meet?

A
- For self-contained class, as part of total group orientation
- For middle school class, as part of adviser/advisee period
- For high school class, as part of homeroom or in a study period

See page 345 for more information.

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Appendix E
Teacher Anecdotal Notes

Week of 9-20-99

Actions Taken: Discuss what attentive listening looks like and sounds like.

Tell / Retell

1. Each person tells a story
2. Then another person has to tell about one of their partner's stories

Reflection:

PLUSES (+)	MINUSES (-)	INTERESTING (?)
Most of the children could retell their group's stories	Some students were not looking at each other when they were listening to their group members. A lot of the students could not remember specific details	Kids were telling each other to lower their voices because they couldn't hear their own group's stories. They told each other positive remarks like "interesting story" and "that sounds cool"

Comments, Notes (Continued on back, as needed):

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Appendix F
Observation Checklist

SOCIAL SKILLS OBSERVATION SHEET

Date: 1-30-11 Site: _____ Time: 11:15 a.m.

KEY:
+ mastered
- working
0 not at all

SKILL	Students names						COMMENTS
Looks at speaker	-	-	+	-	0	0	
Talks clearly to others	+	+	+	0	-	+	
Includes everyone in group	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Uses peoples' names	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Follows rules for group activity	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Stays on task	0	+	+	0		-	
Appropriate voice control	0	+	+	0	0	-	
Takes turns	-	+	+	-	-	-	
Listens to others	-	-	-	-	0	+	
Shares materials	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Expresses ideas	+	+	+	+	+	+	
Offers help when needed	-	-	-	-	-	+	
Aware of others' feelings	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Can compromise	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Comes to class prepared	+	+	+	+	+	+	
Accepts other's ideas	+	+	+	+	+	+	

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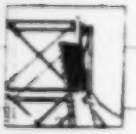
Blueprint:

ELEMENTARY LESSON

TELL / RETELL



Setting Up the Scaffolding

To teach about attentive listening, prepare a bulletin board with an attentive listening theme. Show pictures of (a) a class attending to the teacher, (b) group members attending to each other, (c) a class attending to a visitor, and (d) a class attending to a student speaker.

Make and display a T-chart on the bulletin board.

ATTENTIVE LISTENING

SOUNDS LIKE	LOOKS LIKE
1. "uh huh"	1. eyes alert and focused on talker
2. "I see."	2. mirroring emotions
3. clarifying questions	3. leaning forward or toward speaker
4. silence	4. head nods at right time
5. paraphrasing	5. taking notes
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.

Working the Crew

Gather students around and explain the bulletin board and chart. Ask volunteers to share how it feels to have someone's full attention. Solicit several answers. Demonstrate with the principal, another teacher or a volunteer what attentive listening looks and sounds like.

Divide students into pairs. Instruct one student to share a fun adventure. Instruct the other to attend closely so he/she can repeat the story. Walk among the pairs and give a thumbs-up to each child seen listening.

Use this monitoring time to be aware of misbehaving students, especially during these times when interpersonal skills and social behavior are the focus. Be aware of "the kid who..." seeks attention, feels inadequate, makes the power play, is looking for revenge or shows signs of emotional disturbances.

Appendix H
Healthy/Unhealthy Expressions Communication Activity

Healthy Unhealthy Expression

Objective

To learn to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy expression of feelings

Materials

Healthy Unhealthy Expression Worksheets (Handout 20), pens or pencils as needed

Procedure

1. Discuss the difference between healthy and unhealthy expression of feelings. For example, if a person were angry, unhealthy expression would be throwing something and breaking it, whereas healthy expression would be talking about the problem without exploding. Invite students to share a few additional examples.
2. Ask students to find a partner and give each pair a Healthy Unhealthy Expression Worksheet (Handout 20). Partners are to work together to fill in the worksheet.
3. After students complete the worksheet, have several pairs share examples of healthy and unhealthy expression for selected feelings. Record all suggestions on the chalkboard under the headings *Healthy Expression* and *Unhealthy Expression*.

Discussion

Content Questions

1. Was it more difficult to think of healthy or unhealthy ways to express the feelings?
2. Were some feelings more difficult than others to find ways to express?

Personalization Questions

1. Do you usually express your feelings in healthy or unhealthy ways?
2. If you do practice unhealthy ways, can you do anything about that? Have you ever changed the way in which you have expressed feelings?
3. Do you see any payoffs from unhealthy expressions of emotions?
4. Do you see any advantages to healthy expression? What can you do to increase healthy expression?

To the Leader

The distinction between these two types of expression is particularly important because children who practice healthy expression will also be more emotionally healthy in general.

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